

NEW SOMERSET TOURISM ASSOCIATION UNDER WAY

The New Somerset Tourism Association is now officially in being. The certificate of incorporation was issued on 17th June 2009 making it official that the former Sedgemoor Tourism Association had ceased to exist and is now a trade association, "run by the trade for the trade", as a community interest company, to promote Somerset as a tourist destination and to represent the views of the Somerset tourist industry.

THE END OF AN ERA

The Sedgemoor Tourism Association was formed in 1986 at the request of the Sedgemoor District Council to inform the District Council of the views of tourism based businesses regarding all aspects of tourism related issues. The aim was that the Council could support tourism by having direct contact and liaison with the trade in Sedgemoor.

It must be said over the past 23 years that in the main, The relationship between the local authority and The Sedgemoor Tourism Association has been a successful one. Whilst we have not always agreed over some of the issues, there is no doubt that over a period of many years marketing and promotions initiatives have been extremely successful, due to the joint efforts of the Council and the Association together with the support from the county – Somerset Tourism Partnership and South West Tourism. It has always been recognised that promoting the name Somerset as the destination and informing the public at large of our existence and where we are located on the map, has been of paramount importance.

The past couple of years have seen changes within districts and within the membership of South West Tourism.

There has also been for many years the proposal to form destination management organisations for Somerset and the other nine areas of the South West. This has been promoted by South West Regional Development Agency and the South West Tourism. Many meetings have been held over the years which trade representatives have attended. Due to many factors, but mainly due to funding, not just for the present but more importantly the future, progress has been extremely slow – meanwhile the Tourism industry is still working hard to sustain the 26,000 jobs and improve the £860 million of income created annually.

It was felt by the Sedgemoor Tourism Association Committee, supported by members at an extraordinary general meeting on 29th April 2009, that the time has come to provide the tourism trade of Somerset with a united voice regarding the promotion and marketing of Somerset. It has to be noted that this work had been undertaken by the old STA over the past 15 or so years, to the benefit of the whole county. This year's efforts provide the point by the initiatives undertaken: 4 days at Manchester Holiday Show, 6 days at NEC Boat, Leisure & Caravan Show, 5 days Open Top Bus Tour of the Home Counties plus 5 days Open Top Bus Tour of South Wales – a total of 20 days out of the county distributing thousands of Somerset information brochures to thousands of potential visitors. So here is an opportunity for the trade to become more pro-active and support the Somerset tourism industry to become more prosperous for everyone's benefit.

The first Directors' meetings are taking place over the next few weeks, and full reports and proposals will be published as soon as possible.

MEMBERSHIP

All existing paid up S. T. A members will automatically become members of the new Somerset Tourism Association. Subscriptions renewable 1st October 2009. New members who are accepted for membership will have their subscription valid until 1st October 2010.

OPPORTUNITY

The new Somerset Tourism Association will be liaising with the Somerset Tourism Partnership and South West Tourism over all issues concerning marketing and promotion. Plans are already being discussed for promotion initiatives for 2010. This is an exciting and momentous time for the Somerset tourism trade-make sure you let it be known to any trade colleagues or potential associated members that we need everyone's support. Meetings for members will be arranged throughout the year and it is anticipated that the first general meeting for members will be arranged sometime in September 2009.

Thank you to everyone who over the past 23 years has helped, assisted or supported the Sedgemoor Tourism Association in any way. You and the association can be extremely proud of all that it has achieved. Long may this continue under the new association!

MEETING WITH MALCOLM BELL CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF SOUTH WEST TOURISM

Instigated by Richard House, a meeting took place on Friday 26th June 2009 at which issues concerning the Somerset Tourism Industry were raised with Malcolm Bell regarding Towards 2015, especially taking into consideration the existing economic situation.

QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY

A lot of emphasis is placed on quality and any business needs to endeavour to provide quality and value for money (not cheap), in order to survive, but to sustain the 26,000 jobs and the £850 million of income annually into Somerset, a need for volume is essential. Promoting quality against volume unfortunately is an elitist idea which the majority of accommodation providers, attractions and retailers of Somerset cannot exist on.

Millions of pounds have been spent by the Somerset Tourism trade over recent years with the aim of improving standard and service to the visitor and resident alike. This investment is obviously justified by jobs and wealth creation achieved annually.

SUSTAINABLE AND GREEN TOURISM

Wherever possible the tourism industry supports both ideas. However it is unfair to target sustainable and green agendas at the trade, while many of the issues concerning sustainable, green and residential requirements are not in the control of business, rather national and local government.

MARKETING AND PROMOTING SOMERSET

Malcolm Bell recently commented in the press and related the point at the meeting that destination awareness was an important issue and that national brand leaders such as M&S, Persil, Mars & Ford, continually ran advertising and promotional campaigns in order to prevent them from becoming at risk from competitors. It was agreed that marketing and promotions are most important and Somerset trade cannot be complacent. Malcolm recognised the importance of this issue especially as jobs and income were created by visitors. New business needed to be nurtured and the awareness of the existence of Somerset on the map needed to be promoted.

FUNDING

Everyone is aware of budget cuts, it seems as though the South West is harshly treated in comparison with other regions, when it comes to sharing out the new bidding. Criteria introduced by S.W.T was criticised for its complications and unsuitability for support of the industry.

The fact that the promise of £50,000, is for 3 years to support the D.M.O schedule was also criticised as the arrangement had now be cancelled.

It was also agreed that local government should receive additional finance when their budgets that are set by national government, in order for tourism to be better supported at a local level. A minister for tourism should be appointed with the sole purpose of overseeing tourism.

TRAINING & SKILLS

The provision is extremely important to achieve improved standards and quality of experience and Somerset has received excellent service over the past 18 months, due to the efforts of Louisa Turner. This service should be supported and continued. Once again fundraising is an issue.

TIC'S WEBSITE

The importance of Tourism Information centres was also recognised and various recent surveys has emphasised that visitors look forward to the service available at these centres and also look to them to recommend what to see and do in the area. A website in order to be successful should reflect the needs of the visitors and businesses alike.

ACCREDITATION OF ACCOMMODATION

The Visit Britain and AA schemes are recognised as the main schemes in place though are not necessarily suited to the needs of providers. Both schemes are recognised by local authorities in order that businesses may advertise in promotional brochures. Some of the objections raised cost and credibility, hence the proposal for the Somerset Tourism Association to introduce an accreditation schedule, less expensive and more suitable for the trade, similar to schemes run and recognised by other UK associations.

Finally it appeared that a conclusion was agreed on the need for all marketing and promotion of the destination – volume was necessary but quality and value for money was most important. The consumer would be the judge of the service provided. Agencies like South West Tourism & R.D.A need to lobby government rigorously regarding funding sustainable and green issues.

The Regional Development agency needs to be more transparent as to a) budgets and b) who is making decisions. It was agreed to hold further meetings subject to any results achieved from this meeting.

CURRENT DIRECTORS AS JULY 2009

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VICE CHAIRMAN

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DIRECTORS

John Turner
(Clark's Village)
Len Issac
(Association of Major Holiday Parks)
Richard House
(Holiday Resort Unity)
Bob Smart
(Cheddar Caves & Gorge)
Cedric Lodge
(Sunningcrest Caravan Park)
Daniel Medley
(Wookey Hole Caves)
Michelle O'Hara
(Pontins Holiday Park)
Tom Ashton
(Warren Guest House)
Mike Davies
(Chelston Motorhomes, Wellington)
Colin Morris
(Trader, Burnham on Sea)

A total of 18 Directors are proposed Any nominations for the 4 remaining places may be forwarded to the Secretary, Paul Bowkett.

THE NEW WEBSITE FOR THE SOMERSET TOURISM ASSOCIATION WILL COME ONLINE BY THE END OF JULY.

www.somersetcoastandcountry.co.uk
and
www.somersetcoastandcountry.com